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MATTHEW SCHNEIDER/LOS ANGELES

SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL NINE YEARS AFTER

ANNCR: THE PEOPLE OF THE BRITTANY COAST OF FRANCE ARE ANGUISHED AND ANGRY OVER THE WRECK OF A GIANT OIL TANKER: A DISASTER WHOSE TERRIBLE DIMENSIONS FILL WORLD HEADLINES. JUST OVER NINE YEARS AGO SIMILAR NEWS STORIES WERE WRITTEN ABOUT A MAJOR OIL ACCIDENT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD. VOA WEST COAST CORRESPONDENT MATTHEW SCHNEIDER VIISTED CALIFORNIA'S SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL TO FIND OUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE. HERE IS HIS REPORT.

VOICE: THE TURBINE SCREAMS AS THE COAST GUARD HELICOPTER LIFTS FROM ITS PAD AT THE LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- SOUND (HELICOPTER) IN FULL BRIEFLY THEN UNDER FOR:

VOICE: THE ORANGE AND WHITE CRAFT LEANS TO LEFT AND IN FEW MOMENTS IS OVER THE PACIFIC OCEAN. A TILT TO THE RIGHT AND THE HELICOPTER HEADS NORTHWEST. FOLLOWING THE CALIFORNIA COASTLINE, IT WILL TAKE THIRTY MINUTES TO REACH ITS PATROL AREA; THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL.

TAPE: SOUND UP BRIEFLY, THEN UNDER AND OUT BEHIND.

VOICE: WORLD ATTENTION FOCUSED ON THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL IN JANUARY 1969 WHEN THE MOUTH OF AN UNDER WATER OIL WELL BURST ALLOWING MILLIONS OF LITRES OF OIL TO ESCAPE. ONE REPORT SAYS THAT DURING! THE FIRST ELEVEN DAYS OF THE EMERGENCY, 4500 METRIC TONS OF CRUDE OIL WERE DEPOSITED ON NEARLY 90 KILOMETERS OF COASTLINE.

VOICE: (CONT) OF COURSE THE BRITTANY SPILL IS MANY TIMES LARGER THAN THE SANTA BARBARA ACCIDENT, BUT THE EMOTIONS OF THE PEOPLE IN SANTA BARBARA IN 1969 AND THOSE IN FRANCE THESE PAST TWO WEEKS ARE REMARKABLY SIMILAR.

ROBERT SOLLEN IS A REPORTER FOR THE SANTA BARBARA "NEWS-PRESS" HE COVERED THE 1969 BLOWOUT:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- SOLLEN

"IT'S A TRAUMATIC THING TO WATCH THE OIL COME IN ON THE BEACHES WHERE THERE USED TO BE WHITECAPS AND BREAKERS -- NOW THERE'S A GENTLY ROLLING SWELL THAT JUST COATS THE BEACH WITH OIL. AND YOU HAVE THE IMPRESSION WHEN YOU SEE THIS IN YOUR IMMEDIATE AREA, THAT THERE IS, IT'S A WHOLE OCEAN OF OIL INSTEAD OF SALT WATER THAT'S WASHING UP ON YOUR BEACHES."

VOICE: ONE OF THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL BLOWOUT WAS THE INITIATION OF REGULAR COAST GUARD MONITORING OF OFFSHORE OIL EXPLORATION AND DRILLING. THE COAST GUARD IS ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAFETY OF THE SHIPPING LANES IN THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL. THAT HAS BECOME ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT SINCE THE COMPLETION OF THE TRANS-ALASKA OIL PIPELINE; MANY OIL TANKERS NOW USE THE CHANNEL'S PROTECTED WATERS TO BRING THEIR CARGO TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REFINERIES.

ANOTHER CONSEQUENCE OF THE1969 BLOWOUT WAS INCREASED CONGRESSIONAL ATTENTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS. PUBLIC PRESSURE MOVED CONGRESS TO ENACT STIFF ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS INCLUDING THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT OF 1970. THE LAW REQUIRES, FOR INSTANCE, THAT OIL COMPANIES FILE DETAILED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORTS BEFORE FEDERAL PERMITS ARE ISSUED FOR EACH STEP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFFSHORE OIL. MANY

VOICE: (CONT) STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE ENACTED SIMILAR LAWS UNDER INCREASING PUBLIC PRESSURE.

THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL BLOWOUT ALSO GALVANIZED THE ECOLOGY MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES.

THE DAY AFTER THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL BLOWOUT, LOCAL CITIZENS ESTABLISHED "GET OUT OIL." THE ORGANIZATION IS MOST OFTEN KNOWN BY ITS ACRONYM, "G-O-O," WHICH IS AN AMERICAN SLANGO TERM FOR ANY STICKY, SHAPELESS, UNATTRACTIVE MASS.

"G-O-O" HAS BEEN THE PRINCIPAL FOE OF OIL COMPANIES' CONTINUED ATTEMPTS TO EXPAND OPERATIONS IN THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL.

MRS. ELLEN SIDENBERG WAS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF "G-O-O" AND IS NOW IT'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

TAPE: CUT THREE SIDENBERG

"WITH TIME PEOPLE HAVE BECOME MORE REALISTIC AND THEY FACE THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT GAVE THESE OIL COMPANIES VALID LEASES AND THAT THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO BE THERE DEVELOPING THOSE LEASES. BUT WE WANT TO LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF OIL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CHANNEL AND TO SEE THAT IT IS DONE IN AN ORDERLY FASHION AND SAFELY."

VOICE: MRS. SIDENBERG'S MODERATING LANGUAGE AND GRANDMOTHERLY APPEARANCE HIDE A FIERCE DETERMINATION THAT HAS GONE THROUGH DOZENS OF LEGAL BATTLES.

AT THE TIME OF THE 1969 BLOWOUT THERE WERE THIRTEEN OIL DRILLING PLATFORMS IN THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL, WITH ANOTHER FIFTY PLANNED. ARMED WITH NEW LAWS AND UNCOVERING

VOICE: (CONT) SOME OLD FORGOTTEN ONES, G-O-O AND OTHER PRO-ENVIRONMENTALIST ORGANIZATIONS, USED THE COURTS TO SLOW DOWN OIL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CHANNEL. ONLY ONE RIG HAS BEEN ADDED IN THE PAST NINE YEARS.

BUT THE OIL COMPANIES ARE ABOUT TO MAKE A FRESH BID TO OPEN UP THE CHANNEL LEASES. THAT, INCREASED OIL TANKER TRAFFIC AND PLANS TO BUILD A LIQUIFIED NATURAL GAS PORT AND STORAGE FACILITY IN THE CHANNEL CONCERN THE PEOPLE OF SANTA BARBARA. AGAIN, MRS. SIDENBERG:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- SIDENBERG

"WE ACTUALLY FEAR A TANKER COLLISION IN THE CHANNEL MORE THAN ANOTHER BLOWOUT. THE CHANNEL IS 20 MILES (32 KILOMETERS WIDE AT ITS WIDEST POINT AND IT IS INTERSPERSED WITH THOSE PLATFORMS, WITH DRILLING RIGS. THEY PLAN AN L-N-G PORT AT THE NORTHERN END OF THE CHANNEL. THE CHANNEL IS JUST NOT MADE TO HOLD BOTH TANKER TRAFFIC AND OIL PLATFORMS."

VOICE: DESPITE THEIR GROWING FREQUENCY AND SIZE, VERY LITTLE RESEARCH HAS GONE INTO THE LONG-RANGE ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF MAJOR OIL SPILLS. HOWEVER, PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF SOME SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SCIENTISTS ARE MORE HOPEFUL THAN HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED.

A MARINE BOTANIST AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SANTA BARBARA, MICHAEL NEUSHUL IS ONE OF THE FEW SPECIALISTS ON OIL SPILL EFFECTS. MR. NEUSHUL SAYS THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL HAS RECOVERED FROM THE 1969 DISASTER MUCH FASTER THAN PREDICTED, AND HE OFFERED THIS QUALIFIED PREDICTION FOR WHAT THE FRENCH CAN EXPECT.

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- NEUSHUL

"IF IT WERE REFINED OIL I WOULD SAY THEY PROBABLY SHOULD BE VERY CONCERNED. BUT SINCE IT'S CRUDE OIL AND SINCE THIS SPREADS AND IS DISPERSED ON THE SEA'S SURFACE, I THINK IT MIGHT NOT BE AS BAD AS THEY ANTICIPATE. OF COURSE I HAVEN'T SEEN IT AND I DON'T KNOW ANY OF THE DETAILS. BUT I WOULD THINK FROM OUR EXPERIENCES IN SANTA BARBARA THAT IT MAY NOT BE AS BAD AS PEOPLE THINK IT WILL BE."

VOICE: SOME OPTIMISM FOR THE PEOPLE OF BRITTANY AS THEY BEGIN THE LONG TASK OF CLEANING UP THEIR COAST.

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